

## Leadership in Scouting

If there is one thing in Scouting likely to cause lively discussion it is LEADERSHIP. In this and two future issues we will look at some of today's knowledge about leadership- especially leadership by adults- and see how we can make best use of this knowledge to help young people "... grow as resourceful and responsible members of their community".

Definition: Leadership

Leadership is a function that helps a group identify, and move toward, its goal.

Leadership is action by anyone that influences others to follow.

Anyone may provide leadership- it is not the prerogative only of people in authority.

### It's Important to Feel Like a Somebody

"That's the clearest description of that system I have ever heard. Will you come and explain it to our board?" I had just finished a fifteen minute talk on a complex system of procedures to a group of business men and women, and that comment made my day. It made me feel really good- my step became lighter, the song in my heart changed tempo and my work became more challenging. Isn't it wonderful to feel like that?

One of the best measures of our success as Scout leaders is how we feel, as we make our way home after a meeting.

If you're usually in good spirits after a meeting, it probably means you've had some real satisfaction there; that some of the boys have helped you feel like a somebody. Since that sort of feeling is gained with others who feel good about themselves, you can bet your boots some of the boys also are feeling like somebodies, and that the meeting was successful. Successful, if for no other reason than the self-esteem and confidence of some boys and yourself have been reinforced, and each has grown as a person.

The development of positive ideas about oneself (self-esteem or self-worth,) is vital to growth and living one's life to the full. That's what Scouting is all about- and seeing that it happens is perhaps the most important contribution leaders can make to building "resourceful and responsible members of the community". When we have confidence in ourselves, tackling everyday problems is fun and challenging. When we feel put down everything tends to be a problem and we feel less able to cope. So it really is important to accentuate the positive. I'm sure it's easy on your way home to think about the things that didn't go too well at a meeting, but look also at the things that went well- even if it's only one lad's cheery grin.

A low sense of self-worth is common to many so-called non-achievers in school. A teacher told me about a girl who was having trouble with math. She kept saying "I

can't do it", each time her math was wrong. He told her to change from saying "I can't do it" to "I haven't learned how to do it yet". Gradually she caught on to this idea her view of herself changed and so did her ability with math. Now she knows she can do it.

## How Do We Start?

We would all like to be successful leaders. How do we go about helping the youth with whom we work to feel like somebodies?

One of the first things to do is to find out which behaviours help and which hinder growing. Take a moment to think of some of the things that your parents, teachers, leaders did that helped you feel good about yourself and those that put you off. Which of these do you most often use?

Here is a list of behaviours in seven categories beginning with those most helpful and ending with those that are most hindering.

1. An interested, understanding and encouraging attitude.
2. A challenging attitude.
3. Reward and praise.
4. A firm, clear stand, limiting freedom. If punishment is involved, it is administered without anger.
5. A punishing, angry attitude; harsh punishment embarrassing, shaming, insulting, diminishing.
6. A babying and strongly protective attitude.
7. An ignoring or not interested attitude.

In which categories do your most frequent behaviours fit?

What are some likely consequences of using hindering behaviours?

Can any of us afford them?

## Action

Using the information above, here are some actions you can take to build a positive climate at your meetings.

### 1. Avoid put-downs

Blaming and putting others down come very easily to most people in our society but we don't help boys grow by making them feel small or emphasizing their weaknesses. We help by encouraging them to recognize and use their strengths.

At every meeting make a determined effort to say something positive and rewarding to each member. It doesn't have to be something big. "Glad to see you Peter - I missed you last week." If you model this behaviour, others will follow.

Another way of helping boys look at strengths is to involve them in selecting members for special tasks. For example: "We have been asked to provide four boys for a Guard of Honour at City Hall. What important things can we use to help us select the right persons?" When these criteria have been listed and some priority given to them, the boys could each apply them to choosing four names. They would share their selections and eventually decide on the four boys who will represent the troop. In this way, many boys hear of the strengths that other members perceive them to have. What is more, those selected will know why they have been chosen and try all the harder to be good representatives.

### 2. Describe Behaviour

Rather than blame a boy for something that has happened, describe to him what is observable, without judgment. For example: "John, you have been late for our last three meetings," not "John, you're always late".

Words like ever, never, always in this context are blaming. Blaming raises defenses and blocks developing understanding of the issue and of the behaviour. So does name calling.

If you can describe what happened and follow by expressing how it affects you, the way is open to a broader realization and helps a dialogue develop.

"John, you've been late for the last three meetings."

"I know Scouter."

"I'm concerned that you may be losing interest."

"No, that's not true, I've taken on a paper route."

"Oh, I see-and you find it hard to get it done in time."

"Yes I do and I have to eat my supper and everything."

"That's a busy schedule all right. What arrangement can we come to?"

Now the situation is open between you; the information is shared and the climate is set for working out an understanding.

It is important to separate behaviour from the person. He may have acted foolishly-but that doesn't mean he's a fool. He may have acted unkindly, but that doesn't make him mean.

How much more useful it is to bring a problem-solving approach to the matter where no judgments are made. Example: A patrol is in camp and a boy put a pot of water directly on the fire. As the fire burned, the pot tilted and water poured onto the fire. Some typical responses might be:

"Look what you've done, you stupid ass!"

"Don't you know how to put a pot on the fire yet?"

Some of the possible feelings the individual might have are: that he's clumsy or stupid, that his mates don't like him, that camping is the pits.

Taking a problem-solving approach, any member could have said:

"You set the pot on the logs, they burned away and it tipped over. How can we avoid that?"

The boy understands the problem and now discovers ways to avoid it. This approach helps the boy learn a practical skill and feel good about himself.

### 3. Co-operation

One of the ways to help young people learn more helpful ways of behaving is to put more emphasis on cooperative activities in your program. The problem with competition is that one person wins and others lose, and this tends to generate win/lose attitudes which get carried over to other aspects of life. In the process, some people come to see themselves as winners, and others as losers. When the emphasis is on winning, the more competent often get mad at the less competent; sometimes they try to take over and do it for them; sometimes they don't want them around. Activities lose much of their fun if some boys are being pressured by others. This is not to say that there should never be competitive activities, but rather that a balance between competition and cooperation needs to be maintained. Emphasis should be on the fun of learning and doing things together. You can be a winner without coming first.

Have plenty of activities where the reward comes from doing and achieving together, where time is not a heavy pressure and we are not looking for the best or the first.

For example: a project where each lodge, (six or patrol) has to design and make something which incorporates a skill they have recently been taught. When time is up, each group visits each other's construction, and finds one or two things about it that are interesting, useful, beautiful, exciting, new, imaginative, etc. Each group will then

look at its own construction in the light of what others have said about it. They can also talk about how they worked together and how certain behaviour helped or hindered. Help the boys to describe action (behaviour) and to avoid blaming or judgmental comments. Even with praise, describing something and saying how it makes you feel is more helpful than a judgmental statement. For example:

"Peter was a good leader."

This statement will no doubt make Peter feel good but it does not help him to know what was good. Compare with this statement:

"It was exciting when Peter said 'Let's all put our weight on this bar', and we did and..."

#### 4. Listening

People feel they are somebodies when they know you are listening to them. In the early days of Scouting, B.-P. said in his Outlook,

"If you really want to help your boys, listen to them "

We have to program time into our schedules for members to talk with us. This may be particularly important at the beginning and the end of meetings. It may also be important to let the boys know at what times we are specially prepared for them to phone us at home, so that our private time is not constantly interrupted with telephone calls.

Sometimes a person wants to talk when we are occupied and cannot give attention to listening. A useful approach is to say "Is it urgent?" If it is, chances are you will change your priorities to listen. If it isn't, arrange a time to talk-and be sure to keep it.

Another problem which interferes with listening is thinking up our answer while the other person is talking. Once we've got an answer to a part of his conversation, we are just waiting for him to stop, so that we can plug it in. The result is we often miss a great deal of what he is really trying to say, our response is not seen as appropriate and the others get the impression we don't really care. After a while he may no longer bother to talk to you.

## 5. Good Communication depends on:

- Mutual respect. I am important-you are important. Deal with each other as people rather than as, for example, leader and Cub, where the implication is that the one in authority is more important. One of the difficult things for small people to do is talk to adults when they are standing. The difference in height makes it very uncomfortable and continues to remind the little one of how small he is.
- Try to maintain eye contact. This doesn't mean staring, but it does mean looking the other people in the eye quite a bit of the time.
- In communications, 50% of the message is conveyed by body language, 40% by the tone of the voice and only 10% through the words. So, if I want to know what someone is trying to communicate, I have to pay particular attention to body language and the tone of voice.

These must convey the same message as the words-if they do, the message is loud and clear-if not, the message is conflicting. We must try to respond to the message, not just the words. For example, a boy may come to you and say "Scouter, I don't want to play in this game, I'm tired". His tone of voice and body language will give you some very good clues to whether he is really tired, or using that to cover something else-feeling left out, scared of the game or whatever. You can respond simply to the words and the assumptions you make, by saying: "Oh, everyone's going to play, you'll feel better when you get into the game". That sort of answer clearly does not deal with the person. It tends to say "You don't count. Do what everyone else is doing and you'll be all right". A more helpful response might be: "You're too pooped out to play the game?" Or "You look unhappy", (depending on the message in the body language and tone of voice). These responses direct themselves to the individual and say: "I am concerned with you". The effect of this is that it enables the person to reflect more truly what he's feeling, and will help you and the boy get quickly to the problem.

It is amazing how the attitudes of leaders are reflected in the behaviour of their boys. At a recent jamboree I was giving instruction in canoeing. Some leaders who brought a group to me, constantly ordered the boys about. In the canoes, these boys argued about who was to do what strokes, where. Other leaders recognized when their boys could be responsible for themselves and, in these cases, the sternman gave orders, as necessary, and the bowman complied.

A leader in the second category said:

"Jim is afraid of the water and cannot swim but wants to canoe".

"Yeah, he's a scaredy-cat," said another boy, not unkindly.

"He's not a scaredy-cat," said another, "he's just scared of the water."

Jim had no problem getting a partner. He was obviously very scared but also determined. At one time they wobbled and he cried. His sternman quietly encouraged him and his Scouter paddled over and added his encouragement. At no time was there any loud or derogatory talk. Those boys and leaders felt like somebodies. They demonstrated that they cared about one another.

Everyone needs and wants to be valued, to feel that he is somebody. If our own self-esteem is low, we are not able to give much to others, but the happy consequence of building up others is the boost it gives our own feelings.

It is not easy for any of us to change the way we have done things for many years-but if we want to we can and the rewarding responses we get will spur us on. A useful book is *Helping Children to Like Themselves*, by Jane E. Carothers and Ruth S. Gaston, published by R/J Associates, California. It's full of good activities. You can also ask your council for help through special training in this area.

Here's success to your development of somebodies.